

Germans in Britain During the First World War

BETWEEN 1851 AND 1910 over four million people migrated from Germany. Although the vast majority went to America¹ an important minority made its way to England. For instance, in 1861 the German population of England totalled 28,644 and attained a maximum of 53,324 in 1911. Until 1891 the Germans formed the largest single continental immigrant group in England and after this date came second only to Russian Jews.² Nevertheless, historians have devoted little attention to the German community in England.³ This article will first describe the German communities in Britain during the Victorian and Edwardian period. It will then examine the government's reaction to the presence of a large enemy alien population and compare this with unofficial attitudes, which were far less restrained. It will demonstrate how a combination of government measures and popular hostility led to the disappearance of the thriving German communities which had existed before 1914. Finally, it will attempt to account for this attitude toward Germans by placing the question into a series of contexts.

Although Germans had lived in Britain for hundreds of years the nineteenth century witnessed a great increase in their numbers due to a combination of religious, political and economic factors.⁴ Various cities developed major German communities, notably London, which held about half of the German population throughout the Victorian period, but also Liverpool, Manchester and Bradford. In addition, cities all over the country counted small numbers of Germans, including Belfast, Dundee and Nottingham. Among the occupations in which Germans became particularly important was teaching at every level, from governing to university lecturing. Germans were significant as waiters, and also established themselves as retailers in the form of butchers, bakers and barbers. On a larger scale, some of the newcomers set up major textile firms in northern cities, while others became important as financiers, including the Schröders and Sir Ernest Cassel. German communities throughout the

¹ C. Trebilcock, *The Industrialization of the Continental Powers, 1780-1914* (1981), pp. 310-11.

² The figures are taken from the following sources: *Census for the Year 1861*, ii; *Royal Commission on Alien Immigration*, iii, Appendix [Cd. 1741-1], p. 63. H.C. (1903), ix. 1005; *Census of England and Wales, 1911*, ix: *Birthplaces... and Ages and Occupations of Foreigners* [Cd. 7017]. H.C. (1913), lxxviii.

³ The exceptions are R. Ashton, *Little Germany: Exile and Asylum in Victorian England* (Oxford, 1986); and J. C. Bird, *Control of Enemy Alien Civilians in Great Britain, 1914-18* (New York, 1987).

⁴ P. Panayi, 'Germans in Britain during the First World War' (unpublished University of Sheffield Ph.D. thesis, 1988), pp. 4-11.

country developed a rich social and religious life with clubs and churches wherever they settled.⁵

Hostility had begun to develop towards the immigrants during the late Victorian and Edwardian years. For instance, Germans endured some of the animosity which manifested itself in the East End of London and eventually led to the passage of the Aliens Act of 1905. Propagandists saw the newcomers, particularly Russian Jews, as an economic and sanitary threat.⁶ Specifically anti-German hostility became evident in the form of suspicion of employees in various trades, such as clerks.⁷ However, the bulk of the animosity towards Germans in Britain arose as a result of the deterioration of Anglo-German diplomatic relations during the Edwardian era. On one level this took the form of a primitive conspiracy theory put forward by the radical Unionist journalist, Leo Maxse. He believed that many wealthy Germans, both Jews and Gentiles, simply resided in Britain in order to help their native land to take control of the country.⁸ However, more widespread became the fear of German spies which manifested itself in the appearance of popular novels on the subject, letters to newspapers and speeches by M.P.s. 'Spy-fever' reached peaks of intensity when Anglo-German hostility became strongest as during the Moroccan crisis of 1905-6. But the pre-war outbreaks of anti-German sentiment did not result in any great hardship for the Germans within Britain although they did lead the government to set up a Secret Service Bureau and also to make plans to control the German population if war broke out.⁹

It is something of a cliché to say that the First World War meant government intervention on an unprecedented scale, but we need to bear this fact in mind when dealing with official attitudes to the aliens question. In the interests of national security and a more efficient prosecution of the war, the government introduced a series of measures. For instance, it immediately took control of the railways and suspended trading on the Stock Exchange. More importantly, it passed the Defence of the Realm Act which allowed it to introduce innumerable Orders in Council.¹⁰ The most important piece of legislation dealing specifically with Germans in Britain was the Aliens Act which was rushed through parliament on 5 August 1914, the day after Britain declared war upon Germany. Like the Defence of the Realm Act, it allowed the government to pass subsequent Orders in Council which controlled the activities of aliens with regard to entry into Britain, residence,

⁵ Anglo-German Publishing Company, *Die Deutsche Kolonie in England* (1913); S. D. Chapman, 'The migration of merchant enterprise: German merchant houses in the 18th and 19th centuries', *Bankhistorisches Archiv*, vi (1980), 20-40.

⁶ B. Gainer, *The Alien Invasion* (1972).

⁷ G. Anderson, 'German clerks in England, 1870-1914: another aspect of the great depression debate', in *Hosts, Immigrants and Minorities*, ed. K. Lunn (Folkestone, 1980), pp. 201, 204, 206.

⁸ *National Rev.*, Dec. 1911, p. 499, March 1912, p. 10, Apr. 1912, p. 189.

⁹ C. Andrew, *Secret Service* (1985), pp. 34-59.

¹⁰ A.J.P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-45* (Harmondsworth, 1970; repr. 1985), p. 25; A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (Boston, Mass., 1965; repr. 1986), pp. 152-7; J. Stevenson, *British Society, 1914-45* (Harmondsworth, 1984), p. 58.

registration and any other aspect of their lives. One authority has rightly asserted that the act 'essentially gave the Secretary of State a free hand to regulate aliens as he saw fit'.¹¹ The most important Order prohibited enemy aliens from entering or leaving the country without a permit. Those who remained would have to register at the nearest police station and could not travel more than five miles without a permit. In addition, they could not own arms, ammunition or any means of communication; nor could they reside in certain areas considered of military importance. Other Orders gave the Home Secretary power to close down German clubs and newspapers.¹²

Because of the imposition of such restrictions on individual liberty, which would have proved anathema to any liberal in pre-war England, it might have been expected that those on the Left of the political spectrum would have opposed the Aliens Restriction Act. However, most of the criticism came from the Right, which persistently believed that the government had not done enough to deal with the threat posed by Germans in Britain. Within the Right can be included both local and national newspapers. In Fleet Street the Northcliffe journals, especially the *Daily Mail*, the *Evening News* and the *Weekly Dispatch*, became obsessed with the enemy aliens question. So did a group of M.P.s who may be described as the Radical Right because of, among other reasons, their determination to win the war using revolutionary methods, such as the bombing of civilian targets within Germany. This group wanted a crushing defeat of Germany and opposed any compromise. At the same time, it stood against any individuals who appeared to threaten this possibility, including both pacifists and enemy aliens. Prominent members of the Radical Right included William Joynson-Hicks, Sir Richard Cooper and Henry Page-Croft, all M.P.s, together with lords such as Charles Beresford and Leith of Fyvie. As the war progressed they played a part in the formation of various political organizations and greatly influenced government aliens policy. For instance, their voices of protest were crucial in persuading the government to pass the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act, 1918. Throughout the war criticism was levelled against the fact that thousands of Germans had become naturalized before 1914 and had therefore obtained all the rights of Englishmen. Consequently, the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act went through parliament in the summer of 1918, during a period of intense opposition towards enemy aliens. This measure gave the Home Secretary wide-ranging powers to revoke naturalization certificates.¹³ During the same period the government also decided, again under strong public pressure, to limit employment in the civil service during the war to children of natural-born British or Allied subjects. In fact, like the Aliens Restriction Act, this rule remained in force after 1919. The latter formed the basis of all subsequent legislation with regard to immigrants entering Britain.¹⁴

¹¹ V. Bevan, *The Development of British Immigration Law* (1986), pp. 72-3.

¹² Aliens Restriction (Consolidation) Order, 1914.

¹³ Much of the criticism towards naturalized Germans can be found in *The Times History of the War*, viii (1916), 55-7. See also Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser. (Lords), xxii, cols. 462-80, 29 June 1916.

¹⁴ Public Record Office, CAB 23/7, WC 443 (7), 11 July 1918; C. Holmes, *John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society, 1871-1971* (Basingstoke, 1988), pp. 112-13.

Two features of the wartime internment policy immediately strike the observer: the government's lack of a consistent policy and the importance of public opinion. Before August 1914 no plans existed for wholesale confinement of enemy aliens. However, three days after the declaration of war the general staff decided upon the arrest of all Germans and Austrians between the ages of seventeen and forty-two. But, on 8 August, a meeting of representatives from the War Office, Home Office and Colonial Office agreed to rescind this decision, only to implement it again at the end of August 1914 because there existed a feeling of uncertainty among the public 'regarding the advisability of allowing' large numbers of enemy aliens to remain at large.¹⁵ By 23 September 10,500 civilians had been confined to camps. But by this time the War Office, which held the main responsibility for housing prisoners, could find no more space to intern them. Consequently, wholesale internment was suspended.

By 20 October anti-German hostility had reached its first peak as a result of military events on the continent. The animosity manifested itself in press comment and riots as will be described shortly. Because it surfaced in such a way the Home Office, in consultation with the War Office, decided to arrest all male enemy aliens of military age so that a further 1,000 men faced arrest. However, the War Office could still find no more space to house prisoners and in fact the cabinet decided upon the release in the next few months of internees considered to pose no threat to national security.¹⁶

May 1915 was the most important date for the development of internment policy. On 7 May a German submarine torpedoed the *Lusitania* off the Irish coast, an act which resulted in the loss of more than a thousand civilian lives. This event led to widespread anti-German riots and calls for wholesale internment. Public meetings demanding this took place throughout London.¹⁸ Consequently, on 13 May the prime minister, Herbert Asquith, announced to the Commons that all German males of military age (aged seventeen to fifty-five) would face internment, while females would be repatriated. He also announced the establishment of advisory committees to deal with appeals for exemption from internment and repatriation. Subjects of German birth who had become naturalized would remain at liberty unless they appeared dangerous. As a result of the new policy the number of internees (including Austrians) reached 32,440 by November 1915.¹⁹

Why did the government pursue such an inconsistent policy? Like so much else in the Great War, a novel situation existed: Britain had not interned enemy subjects since the struggle with Napoleon.²⁰ At the same time, successive governments were unable to resist the popular clamour for internment. The issue of controlling enemy aliens became very important at various times during the Great War. Failure to act led to periods of government unpopularity. As a final illustration of this point

¹⁵ P.R.O., WO 32 5368, letter of A. H. Dennis to the deputy assistant adjutant general, 12 Nov. 1914.

¹⁶ P.R.O., HO 45 10760/269116/6, 8, 25.

¹⁷ *Inside Asquith's Cabinet: from the Diaries of Charles Hobhouse*, ed. E. David (1971), p. 206.

¹⁸ *The Times*, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13 May 1915.

¹⁹ Hansard, 5 (Commons), boxi, col. 1842, 13 May 1915; P.R.O., HO 45 11522/287235/23.

²⁰ R. F. Roxburgh, *The Prisoners of War Information Bureau in London* (1915), p. viii.

we can look at the election campaign of November and December 1918. Initially Lloyd George described the question of expelling enemy aliens as 'simply a side issue'. However, the strength of public feeling made this the main issue in the second half of the campaign, together with the demands for punishment of the Kaiser and full payment for the war by Germany. Lloyd George had to adopt all three policies.²¹ As a result, the 24,255 enemy aliens remaining in camps in November 1918 declined to 5,000 by May 1919. In all, the size of the German community in Britain fell from 57,500 in 1914 to 22,254 in 1919.²²

What was the experience of internment for those Germans who, in some cases, spent nearly five years behind barbed wire? During 1914 they were confined in a great variety of buildings. The exhibition hall at Olympia acted as one of the earliest camps and many accounts describe it as very unpleasant. It remained open until December 1914.²³ The War Office, responsible for the administration of many of the early civilian camps, transferred the internees to one of nine ships it had requisitioned which lay off the coastal towns of Ryde, Gosport and Southend.²⁴ The most famous London camp was Alexandra Palace. It reached a maximum of 3,000 prisoners at any one time but about 17,000 men passed through it.²⁵ But the most important internment camps were on the Isle of Man. Their administration became extremely complex. The Home Office held the major responsibility which it delegated to the insular authorities. There were two camps, one at Douglas, the other using a former territorial base camp at Knockaloe Moor, near Peel. This eventually held a maximum of 23,000 people. One authority described it as a town without women and children. It had four sub-camps which were divided, in turn, into five or more sections called compounds.²⁶

Prisoners seem to have received what can be described as 'fair' treatment. Nevertheless, many of them complained bitterly about some aspects of their confinement, notably their food ration. Although this initially proved sufficient, it declined in quantity and quality following the German submarine blockade from 1917. Prisoners consumed items such as horseflesh and salt herrings. At Knockaloe prisoners turned to eating seagulls, cats and dogs because of the inadequacy of their rations.²⁷ The main problem facing the internees was finding a way to pass their time. Some men played a part in camp administration while others acted as bakers, shoe-cleaners and valets. Few prisoners actually secured enough work to occupy their whole day. Many turned to education or sporting activities.²⁸ Although the

²¹ R. E. Bunselmeyer, *The Cost of War, 1914-19* (Hamden, Conn., 1975), pp. 126-48.

²² P.R.O., HO 45 11025/410118/2, 3; HO 45 11522/287235/148; *Report of the Committee Appointed to Consider Applications for Exemption from Compulsory Repatriation submitted by Interned Enemy Aliens* [Cmd. 383]. H.C. (1919), x.

²³ C. S. Peel, *How we lived then, 1914-18* (1929), p. 42; R. Rocker, *The London Years* (1956), pp. 251-3, 258.

²⁴ P.R.O., HO 45 10760/269116/192; Hansard, 5 (Commons), lxx, col. 1769, 15 March 1915.

²⁵ Bundesarchiv, R85 3023; R. Rocker, 'Alexandra Palace internment camp in the First World War' (reproduced from typescript, 1918, British Library 9086 i 21).

²⁶ For the Isle of Man camps see P.R.O., HO 45 10946/266042 and 10947/266042; B. E. Sargeant, *The Isle of Man and the Great War* (Douglas, 1922), pp. 58-94.

²⁷ For food provision see P.R.O., HO 45 10835/329066; see also P. Stoffa, *Round the World to Freedom* (1933), pp. 240-1.

²⁸ P. Cohen-Portheim, *Time Stood Still: my Internment in England, 1914-18* (1931), pp. 44, 45, 91-3, 97.

overwhelming majority of internees remained in good physical health a substantial proportion developed a neurosis caused by up to four years of confinement in camps surrounded by barbed wire, with little to do, and away from women and children.²⁹ Therefore, although the War Office and Home Office did not set out deliberately to mistreat internees, the experience of internment remained unpleasant.

In addition to passing measures against German individuals within Britain, the government also undertook drastic moves to control enemy alien businesses. Writing in 1923, C. R. Hennings claimed that the treatment of German property during the war was guided by the motto 'Vernichtung und Aneignung' (annihilation and acquisition). To support his assertion, he quoted an extract from a speech made by Sir Edward Carson (then a member of the war cabinet) at Portsmouth in October 1917 which ran, 'We must destroy every German business and get these businesses ourselves'.³⁰ While this may not have been the aim of politicians, public and civil servants in 1914, such views had become widespread by the conclusion of peace. Attitudes hardened as the war progressed and the government had to introduce new measures to calm public opinion. Again, the Radical Right played a major part in directing the attitudes of the populace. Members of this group had taken an active role in the tariff reform campaign during the Edwardian period: the Great War presented an opportunity to strike a blow at German business. Within Britain it afforded easy prey. Whether it consisted of the branches of major German banks within London or a local grocer of enemy nationality, all represented a threat and, by the end of the war, the government had taken steps to control enterprises of all sizes, particularly by means of the Trading with the Enemy Acts. On the conclusion of peace the Treaty of Versailles declared that 'German influence in trade was to be uprooted in the United Kingdom'. The government had the right to retain and liquidate all German property within the British empire, and this formed a fund out of which part of Germany's reparation payments could be recovered. However, although the owner might 'suffer involuntary dispossession', he would receive compensation from the German government.³¹

Clearly, the British authorities had done much to destroy the pre-war German communities. But the measures which were put into operation remained mild compared with some of the proposals suggested by the Germanophobes. During the opening year of the war spy-fever remained rife. A series of Unionist newspapers, notably the *Globe* and the *Daily Mail*, played a major part in spreading the idea that all Germans in Britain acted as agents for their homeland.³² The popular spy novelist, William Le Queux, produced a large number of works

²⁹ A. L. Vischer, *Barbed Wire Disease* (1919).

³⁰ C. R. Hennings, *Deutsche in England* (Stuttgart, 1923), p. 180.

³¹ The legislation against German businesses is summarized in R. F. Roxburgh, 'German property in the war and the peace', *Law Quart. Rev.*, xxxvii (1921), 46-62. Examples of hostility to German traders can be found in *British Empire Union Monthly Record*, July 1917, p. 73; and *Forest Hill, Sydenham and Penge Examiner*, 13 Aug. 1915.

³² *Daily Mail*, 14 Sept. 1914; *Globe*, 2, 4 Sept. 1914.

implying that all Germans in England carried out intelligence activities. One of his works, *German Spies in England*, sold over 40,000 copies in one week in February 1915.³³

As the war dragged on and Britain failed to defeat Germany, a series of propagandists began to develop an advanced conspiracy theory to demonstrate that a 'hidden hand' of German influence controlled Britain and prevented victory on the battlefield. The idea became more widespread within Britain than any of the post-war anti-semitic conspiracy theories but the same writers who put forward ideas about Jewish domination also believed in the existence of a German 'hidden hand'. For instance, Ian Colvin, who had become a leader writer for the radical Unionist *Morning Post* in 1909,³⁴ put forward the most absurd ideas about German influence in his *The Germans in Britain, 1066-1598*, which claimed that Germany, in the form of the Hanseatic League, had controlled Britain throughout this period.³⁵ Another proponent of the 'hidden hand' theory was Ellis Powell, the editor of the *Financial News*, who had taken a major interest in the pre-war Marconi scandal. He thought the 'hidden hand' consisted of one prominent person under the control of Germany.³⁶ An indication of how widespread the ideas about German influence became is provided by the popularity of a series of meetings held on the subject in late 1916 and early 1917 organized by the Women's Imperial Defence Council. Speakers included Ellis Powell together with other prominent radical Unionists including William Joynson-Hicks, Henry Dalziel, Richard Cooper and Arnold White.³⁷ The last of these actually produced his own book entitled *The Hidden Hand*, which claimed that this entity controlled Downing Street, government departments and Fleet Street.³⁸

In the spring and summer of 1918 a new type of conspiracy theory became prevalent involving the sexual corruption, by German spies, of 47,000 major figures in Britain. Its main exponent was Pemberton Billing who had entered the Commons in 1916 on the issue of strengthening Britain's air defences against Zeppelin attacks, another popular cause of the Radical Right. Billing gained an opportunity to publicize his ideas in June 1918 when the dancer Maud Allen prosecuted him for libel because she believed that an article in his *Vigilante* accused her of being a lesbian. The trial attracted a remarkable amount of attention throughout Fleet Street.³⁹

During the Great War all sections of British society became gripped with a passionate hatred of anything connected with Germany. On a minor scale this

³³ *People*, 28 Feb. 1915. Other novels by Le Queux include *The German Spy* (1914) and *The Spy Hunter* (1916).

³⁴ Brief details about Colvin can be found in C. Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society, 1876-1939* (1979), pp. 139-40.

³⁵ I. Colvin, *The Germans in England, 1066-1598* (1915).

³⁶ G. R. Searle, *Corruption in British Politics, 1895-1930* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 249-53.

³⁷ *The Times*, 16 Dec. 1916; *Financial News*, 5 March 1917; Women's Imperial Defence Council, *The 'Unseen Hand' Meeting* (n.d.); P.R.O., HO 45 10756/267450/622.

³⁸ A. White, *The Hidden Hand* (1917).

³⁹ Searle, pp. 256-7; *Imperialist*, 26 Jan. 1918; *The Times*, and *Daily Mirror*, 31 May-6 June 1918.

resulted in a boycott of German music and culture.⁴⁰ More seriously, individuals who had any connection with the enemy faced attack in the press. These included Lord Haldane, the lord chancellor, who had tried to secure a *rapprochement* between Britain and Germany before 1914. In May 1915 Asquith dismissed him from the cabinet because of the strength of hostility towards him.⁴¹ In early 1917 King George V attracted attention, from Left and Right, because of the possibility of allowing the Tsar, and his German-born wife, asylum in England. He was also criticized on account of his German name, which he changed to Windsor.⁴² Other individuals with German connections who faced strong press criticism included Sir Edgar Speyer, the financier,⁴³ Sir Alfred Mond, who became first commissioner of works in 1916,⁴⁴ and Sir Eyre Crowe, Assistant Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, many institutions sacked their German staffs. In October 1914, for instance, restaurants and hotels dismissed their German waiters after a campaign against them by Northcliffe's *Daily Mail* and *Evening News*. In May 1915 a series of strikes took place in various cities calling for the dismissal of German employees. In the same month many trading organizations, including the Stock Exchange and the Manchester Royal Exchange, expelled members of German birth.⁴⁶

The existence of such widespread hostility towards enemy aliens provided a rich soil for the growth of anti-German organizations. For some of them, animosity towards enemy influence in Britain was the main plank in their platform. For others, it constituted simply one item in a Radical Right reform package. The most important specifically Germanophobic group was the British Empire Union which aimed at 'the Extirpation—Root and Branch and Seed—of German control and influence for the British Empire'. To this end it held demonstrations outside any German institutions which remained within Britain, such as churches and restaurants. It also urged support for British goods and a boycott of those of German origin. The organization had supporters throughout Britain: by 1918 it counted over fifty branches and perhaps as many as 10,000 members. Politicians associated with it included Joynson-Hicks, Beresford, Leith of Fyvie and the earl of Bathurst.⁴⁷ Another specifically Germanophobic organization was the Anti-German League, established in the hysteria which followed the sinking of the *Lusitania* in May 1915. This body existed for just one year because its founder, E. J. Balsir Chatterton, faced charges of embezzlement.⁴⁸ More important were Pemberton Billing's Vigilantes.

⁴⁰ E. S. Turner, *Dear Old Blighty* (1980), p. 97.

⁴¹ The hostility towards Haldane has been covered in S. Koss, *Lord Haldane: Scapegoat for Liberalism* (New York, 1969).

⁴² H. Nicolson, *King George V* (1952), pp. 250-1, 307-10; *John Bull*, 30 June 1917; Brit. Libr., Northcliffe Papers, Add. MS. 62175, letter from Leo Maxse, 19 Apr. 1917.

⁴³ See, e.g., A. M. Mandeville, *The House of Speyer* (1915).

⁴⁴ G. M. Bayliss, 'The outsider: aspects of the political career of Alfred Mond, 1st Lord Melchett' (unpublished University of Wales Ph.D. thesis, 1969), pp. 150-1, 218-20.

⁴⁵ P.R.O., FO 800 243.

⁴⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 11, 12 May 1915; *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 12 May 1915.

⁴⁷ P. Panayi, 'The British Empire Union in the First World War', in *The Politics of Marginality? Race, the Radical Right and Minorities in 20th-century Britain*, ed. T. Kushner and K. Lunn (1990), pp. 113-28.

⁴⁸ *John Bull*, 29 May 1915; *Truth*, 21 July, 3 Nov. 1915, 26 June 1916; *Daily Express*, 8 Apr., 22 May 1916; *The Times*, 10 Apr., 15, 22 May 1916.

As well as publicizing their ideas through their journal, they also fought (but lost) two by-elections during the summer of 1918 on the issue of the imposition of a stricter internment policy.⁴⁹ The best-known fringe party of the First World War was Henry Page Croft's National Party. This group put forward strong views against the presence of enemy aliens and constantly campaigned for a stricter internment policy. It reached a climax of activity on 24 August 1918 when it organized a meeting in Hyde Park which carried a petition with 1,250,000 signatures, demanding further internments, to the prime minister.⁵⁰

It proves difficult to determine the influence of these various fringe groups. They were supported by a limited number of M.P.s and had great difficulty in securing new adherents. However, as Arno J. Mayer has pointed out, with specific reference to the National Party, 'as is so often the case with groups of the Far Right, its influence seems to have been quite out of proportion to its numerical strength': he speaks of the British government after the 1918 election as 'the prisoner' of a 'far from unorganized and undirected super-nationalistic impulse'.⁵¹ As has been stressed, the same situation existed during the Great War.

The milder manifestations of hostility towards enemy aliens became very widespread. A final peak of anti-German hostility occurred in the summer of 1918 as a result of both the Billing libel case and the real possibility that Britain could face defeat following Ludendorff's spring offensive. For much of June and July the internment question attracted the attention of the Unionist press, particularly the *Daily Mail* and the *Evening News*. Meetings took place throughout the country while, as Northcliffe wrote, 'almost every small body is passing resolutions against the enemy in our midst'.⁵²

Clearly, during the Great War Germans in Britain endured all the milder forms of persecution in a way in which few other minorities have done in the country's recent history. Worse still, however, was the collective violence against them. Throughout the course of twentieth-century British history, riots have broken out against national and racial minorities on many occasions.⁵³ However, no group has endured wholesale and nationwide attack similar to that on the Germans in the Great War. Violence against them broke out on five main occasions: August 1914, October 1914, May 1915, June 1916 and July 1917.

The first disturbances involved minor sporadic attacks upon German shops in east London.⁵⁴ A slightly more serious riot developed in Keighley involving an attack upon a series of pork butchers' shops owned by Germans.⁵⁵ In October 1914, disturbances affected Deptford and other areas of south London during the first

⁴⁹ Searle, p. 266.

⁵⁰ The National Party receives attention in W. D. Rubinstein, 'Henry Page Croft and the National Party, 1917-22', *Jour. Contemporary Hist.*, ix (1974), no. 1, pp. 129-48. See also *National Opinion*, July 1918, p. 86; *The Times*, 26 Aug. 1918; *Evening News*, 24 Aug. 1918.

⁵¹ A. J. Mayer, 'Post-war nationalisms, 1918-19', *Past & Present*, xxxiv (July 1966), 116-17.

⁵² Brit. Libr. Add. MS. 62245, letter from Northcliffe to Geoffrey Dawson, 5 July 1918.

⁵³ C. Holmes, 'The myth of fairness: racial violence in Britain, 1911-19', *History Today*, xxxv (1985), Oct., pp. 41-5.

⁵⁴ P.R.O., HO 45 10944/257142/4; *East London Advertiser*, 15 Aug., 5 Sept. 1914.

⁵⁵ P.R.O., HO 45 10944/257142/2a; *Manchester Guardian*, 31 Aug. 1914.

peak of anti-German hostility consequent upon the rapid advance of the German armies through Belgium and the atrocity stories which surrounded their movement. Local factors also contributed, particularly the arrival of 800 Belgian refugees in Deptford. On 17 and 18 October thousands of people destroyed German-owned shops. Smaller disturbances also broke out in Lee Green, Brixton, Old Kent Road and Catford, resulting in about sixty arrests.⁵⁶ A week later crowds destroyed pork butchers' shops in Crewe.⁵⁷

The most serious disturbances occurred in May 1915 during the period of anti-German hysteria following the sinking of the *Lusitania*. Typical newspaper headlines included: 'LOSS OF 1,457 LIVES IN THE LUSITANIA. GERMANS GLOAT OVER THE MURDER OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN'. The most inflammatory statements of all came from Horatio Bottomley, the editor of the fiercely nationalistic *John Bull*. In an article of 15 May he unequivocally called for the extermination of all Germans in Britain.⁵⁸

The violence began in Liverpool on Saturday 8 May and continued in the city until Tuesday 11 May. Many thousands of people participated, with the result that over 550 shops were damaged at a cost of at least £40,000 and hundreds of people were arrested. Manchester was the second area to experience disorder but not on the same scale.⁵⁹ Violence became especially serious in London. Areas particularly affected included the whole of the East End, Kentish Town and Camden Town. However, practically every area of the capital experienced disorder from Edmonton in the north to Thornton Heath in the south and from Ilford in the east to Harlesden in the west. In all, the London riots resulted in damage to almost 2,000 properties at a cost of nearly £200,000. Furthermore, 866 people were arrested.⁶⁰ However, the disturbances became truly nationwide. In Yorkshire, for instance, Mexborough, Denaby, Conisborough, Goldthorpe, Sheffield and Rotherham all experienced disorder between Monday 10 May and Saturday 15 May.⁶¹ Other towns included Hull, Greenock, Bury St. Edmunds, Newcastle, South Shields, Neath, Castleford and Walton-on-Thames.⁶² In such circumstances the government clearly had no option but to introduce a policy of wholesale internment and repatriation.

After May 1915 only a few minor outbreaks of violence against German property occurred. The reasons for this seem obvious: so many German shops had already been destroyed and so few enemy aliens remained free. In June 1916 following the death of Kitchener, an event which sections of the press blamed upon German saboteurs in Britain, three areas of London experienced disorder: Acton, Islington and Tooting. Slightly more serious events occurred in July 1917 following an air-

⁵⁶ *Kentish Mercury*, 23 Oct. 1914; *South London Press*, 23 Oct. 1914; *Daily News*, 19 Oct. 1914.

⁵⁷ P.R.O., HO 45 10944/257142/19.

⁵⁸ The causes of the violence are considered in detail by P. Panayi, 'The Lancashire anti-German riots of May 1915', *Manchester Region Hist. Rev.*, ii (1988), 7-10.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-7.

⁶⁰ See P. Panayi, 'Anti-German riots in London during the First World War', *German Hist.*, vii (1989), 194-8; *idem*, *The Enemy in our Midst: Germans in Britain during the First World War* (1991).

⁶¹ *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17 May 1915.

⁶² *Daily Mail*, 15 May 1915; *Weekly Dispatch*, 16 May 1915; *Manchester Guardian*, 17 May 1915.

raid on the capital which had caused fifty-seven deaths and 193 injuries. Districts affected included the East End, Tottenham, Clerkenwell and Chelsea.⁶³

Clearly, Germans in Britain suffered intense and widespread persecution in Britain during the Great War. On the other hand, some friendly feeling did exist towards them. Various charities were set up with the aim of helping Germans. The most important of these was the Society of Friends' Emergency Committee for the Assistance of Germans, Austrians and Hungarians in Distress which made great efforts to help both internees and their wives who remained at liberty.⁶⁴ In addition, a few liberal M.P.s stood up for them in the Commons, notably Joseph King and Josiah Wedgwood.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, they were lone voices facing the massive choirs which shrieked against them.

The First World War resulted in the destruction of the German communities, which had thrived throughout Britain during the Victorian and Edwardian periods, by a combination of government measures and popular hostility. It may be asked whether these were inevitable. In the case of the first, the answer is 'no'. Any government needs to act in the interests of national security during times of war and this naturally leads to some control of the civilian population, both native and alien. However, there is no reason why security considerations should result in wholesale internment and repatriation, as well as the confiscation of all enemy alien property. Such actions are not inevitable. Nevertheless, while a government unhindered by external influences might have adopted a rational course, public opinion, and the press which moulded it, clearly influenced government policy. The population at large exaggerated perceived dangers to a great extent. In a time of total war the 'enemy within' became a potent symbol which had to be controlled. The strength of hostility became so great that the government had to respond to it in order (in May 1915) to prevent civil disorder and then (in July 1918) to avoid a drastic decrease in its popularity. In the sense that it had to respond to public pressure, particularly in a time of war when the support of the population is so crucial, the introduction of irrational measures was inevitable. However, this leads us into the area of attempting fully to understand the strength of popular feeling on the aliens issue and to try to evaluate whether this was inevitable. In order to do this we need to place the problem into the wider contexts of British society during the First World War; the influence of the Radical Right; the recent history of anti-alienism in Britain; and the question of the position of enemy aliens in time of war.

In the context of the general intolerance which gripped Britain during the Great War, the animosity towards enemy aliens offers a single facet. One view of the effects of war upon any society argues that it strengthens its national consciousness.⁶⁶ This would inevitably lead to the creation of out-groups which consisted, in Britain between 1914 and 1918, of Germans, on the battlefield and on the home

⁶³ Panayi, 'Anti-German riots in London', pp. 199-201.

⁶⁴ See A. B. Thomas, *St. Stephen's House: Friends' Emergency Work in England, 1914-20* (1920).

⁶⁵ See, for instance, Hansard, 5 (Commons), lxx, col. 1989, 5 Aug. 1914; cviii, col. 545, 11 July 1918.

⁶⁶ A. D. Smith, 'War and ethnicity: the role of warfare in the formation, self-images and cohesion of ethnic communities', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, iv (1981), 378.

front, and any other groups which opposed the war effort including, particularly, 'pacifists' and 'socialists'. As the conflict progressed the former term applied to anyone who did not desire a crushing defeat of Germany. Like enemy aliens, supporters of peace came under physical attack. It was not only the press and sections of the Unionist party who viewed them as a threat but also the government, which desired to recruit as many soldiers as possible. Its various propaganda agencies made efforts to depict the barbarity of the Germans. For instance, in 1914 the Bryce Committee produced stories about German atrocities in Belgium.⁶⁷ Writing in 1915, Norman Angell provided a clear analysis of the development of intolerance in Britain during the war. He wrote that the country had entered the conflict as the 'antithesis of all Prussian doctrines . . . It was agreed that the political doctrines of Prussia, which it was our mission to destroy, were a menace to human freedom'. Nevertheless, within six months Britain had begun to adopt the militaristic characteristics which it had originally entered the war to fight.⁶⁸

Instead of viewing the Great War as a time when certain principles took control of Britain, we can see the period as the high point of the influence of the 'Radical Right'. The ideologies which became dominant after 1914 had largely developed during the Edwardian age through various individuals and pressure groups such as the militaristic National Service League under Earl Roberts, the Imperial Maritime League, which demanded a strong navy, and Leo Maxse, who had been violently anti-German and xenophobic.⁶⁹ During the war their principles dominated. Individuals such as Horatio Bottomley, William Joynson-Hicks, Charles Beresford, Pemberton Billing and Lord Leith of Fyvie achieved a hold over public opinion through their speeches in parliament, their writings in their journals and their activities connected with various pressure groups. While none of them held office, the government could not ignore them and they therefore influenced government policy, as has been shown with regard to the development of legislation against aliens.

The strength of anti-alienism clearly fits into the context of British society during the First World War. However, it should also be viewed in relation to the recent history of hostility towards immigrants in Britain. Feeling against Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe, escaping from Tsarist persecution, had begun to develop from the late nineteenth century. Organizations came into existence with the specific aim of opposing their immigration in the form of the British Brothers League and the Immigration Reform Association. Hostility to the newcomers resulted in the passage of the Aliens Act of 1905 which introduced restrictions upon the entry of foreigners. Later in the Edwardian age, violence broke out against Chinese and Jewish communities in south Wales in 1911. In the immediate aftermath of the Great War animosity towards newcomers manifested itself in the passage of the 1919 Aliens Act and in riots against coloured communities

⁶⁷ C. Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning* (1977), p. 95.

⁶⁸ N. Angell, *The Prussian in our Midst* (1915), pp. 1, 6-7, 9-10.

⁶⁹ See G. R. Searle, 'Critics of Edwardian society: the case of the Radical Right', in *The Edwardian Age: Conflict and Stability, 1900-14*, ed. A. O'Day (1979).

throughout Britain.⁷⁰ During the nineteen-twenties and thirties, meanwhile, hostility towards Jews became widespread. Myths about their domination of Britain surfaced in the form of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*⁷¹ during the earlier decade, while in the nineteen-thirties the British Union of Fascists attacked Jews in the East End and received sympathy from many quarters.⁷² These details show that the hostility towards German aliens during the Great War should not be considered in a vacuum.

Finally we also need to look at the more general question of aliens in time of war in both Britain and other states during the twentieth century. It was not only the Germans who aroused hostile attention in Britain between 1914 and 1918. Jews of Russian descent also faced attack, although certainly not on the same scale as the enemy population. In addition, the 1919 Aliens Act resulted from hostility to a combination of national and racial groupings. If we turn to Britain during the Second World War we see that there are certain similarities with events in the previous conflict. For instance, when hostilities broke out on both occasions the respective governments had no plans for wholesale internment. However, the situation changed with the arousal of anti-alienism following the first major disappointments: the fall of Belgium in October 1914 and the German invasion of the Low Countries and France in the spring of 1940. Both developments led to wholesale internment. Furthermore, in both conflicts these decisions subsequently underwent change. However, the similarities end here. The Second World War did not witness the height of hostility reached following the sinking of the *Lusitania*. Neither did Churchill's government readopt wholesale internment as Asquith's did in May 1915. Furthermore, the Second World War did not culminate in the passage of a series of vindictive measures as had happened in 1918 and 1919 in the form of, for instance, the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act. German immigrants during the Second World War played a significant part in the fight against Hitler and remained to enrich many fields of British life after the conflict.⁷³

Therefore major differences exist between Britain's treatment of her enemy aliens during the two World Wars. Perhaps the best comparison of all would be that of the condition of Germans in other states at the time of the Great War. Within the British empire, anti-German riots broke out in both Canada⁷⁴ and South Africa following the sinking of the *Lusitania*. In the latter, the disturbances resulted in damage calculated at £676,314. Johannesburg, Cape Town, Bloemfontein, Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Port Elizabeth all suffered badly.⁷⁵ In Australia, meanwhile, the government introduced internment on a large scale and

⁷⁰ Holmes, *Anti-Semitism*, pp. 14-17, 67, 71-2, 89-94, 101; Holmes, 'Myth of fairness', p. 42.

⁷¹ Holmes, *Anti-Semitism*, pp. 141-60.

⁷² R. Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: a History, 1918-85* (Oxford, 1987).

⁷³ The question of Germans in Britain during the Nazi era is summarized in *Exile in Great Britain*, ed. G. Hirschfeld (Leamington Spa, 1984).

⁷⁴ *The Times*, 11 May 1915.

⁷⁵ P.R.O., HO 45 10944/257142/171. But while the disturbances may have begun as anti-German, most of those who suffered were not Germans. The total amount of damage done, £676,314, consisted of the following: 'Enemy property £142,308, joint Enemy and British or Allies property £142,923, and British and Allies property £381,083'.

repatriated its internees in 1919 and 1920 because of the strength of feeling that existed against them.⁷⁶ We can also look at the situation in Brazil in the light of a recent major study by Frederick Luebke. The German population of this country totalled 400,000 by this period.⁷⁷ Brazil did not enter the war until October 1917 but the country experienced serious rioting in April 1917 after the sinking of a Brazilian freighter off the coast of France by a German submarine. Further major disturbances occurred after the commencement of hostilities between Brazil and Germany. The government developed some control over German activities but on a far more restricted scale than in Britain.⁷⁸ Professor Luebke himself makes comparisons between the situation of the German community in Brazil and that in the United States. He concludes that while the latter country persecuted its alien enemies, 'American behaviour pales in contrast to the Brazilian', perhaps because the Germans in Brazil remained more 'divergent from the norms' of the majority community than did those in the United States.⁷⁹ However, the same argument would not explain the difference between American and British behaviour towards enemy aliens. While Germans had their own institutions within Britain, they did not appear as distinctive as other minorities in the country, notably Russian Jews.

The strength of hostility within British society has a different explanation. Having attempted to put the question of Germans in Britain during the First World War into a series of contexts, we have seen that it best fits into that of the tensions aroused by the Great War within Britain itself. Although other minorities have experienced persecution within the country over greater spells of time, none has recently endured the strength of animosity which Germans suffered between 1914 and 1918. Germanophobia almost saturated Britain in a way in which anti-semitism has never done.⁸⁰ It was a fear created by the prospect of a possible defeat by Germany. Britain had stood out as the major world power for much of the preceding century. At various points between 1914 and 1918 it seemed that this had merely served as an illusion of the true position. Rather like a person who experiences a major disappointment after years of success, Britain was gripped by fear, panic and vindictiveness towards Germany and her residents within Britain. The hostility had begun before 1914 but the threat of Germany had always remained distant then, compared with, for instance, the summer of 1918, when Britain stood on the verge of defeat. Although we should not discount the importance of the existence of traditions of anti-alienism in Britain during the twentieth century, the weight of immediate influences best explains the strength of hostility towards Germans in Britain during the Great War.

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⁷⁶ G. Fischer, *Enemy Aliens: Internment and the Homefront Experience in Australia, 1914-20* (St. Lucia, Queensland, 1989).

⁷⁷ F. C. Luebke, *Germans in Brazil* (Baton Rouge, La., 1987), p. 35. However, this figure consists of 'a fairly distinctive ethnic community . . . mostly Brazilian-born and German speaking, infused with a strong sense of group identity and difference from other Brazilians, especially those of Portuguese antecedents'.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* See chs. v, vii, viii.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* See also F. C. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German Americans and World War I* (De Kalb, Ill., 1974).

⁸⁰ Holmes, *Anti-Semitism*, rightly stresses this. See e.g. *ibid.*, pp. 104-11, 133-4.